

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 December 2016

## London Underground staff vote to strike

Clerical staff on the London Underground rail system have voted by a two-thirds majority to strike and by more than 90 percent for action short of a strike. The members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) are protesting the levels of abuse from some Tube users after the closure of all ticket offices on the system.

The closure of the offices was carried through by then London Mayor Boris Johnson, in collusion with the trade unions. No date has been set for any action. Workers are currently imposing an overtime ban.

## Further strikes planned on southeastern UK rail network

Conductors working for Southern Govia Thameslink Railway's operation are set to hold a three-day strike on Tuesday next week.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have been involved in a long-running dispute with the company over the plan to extend the use of driver-only operated (DOO) trains. This will eliminate the safety role of guards who currently operate the closure of doors upon departure on most services. Southern has issued three-month termination of contract notices to all conductors who refuse to sign the new contracts by December 31.

The Southern GTR franchise serves the southeast of England, with services running into the capital, London.

Train drivers belonging to the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) are set to strike over the same issue, with a two-day strike scheduled for December 13/14, with a further seven days of strikes planned. Drivers are imposing an overtime ban, which severely compromises the company's ability to run a full service.

## Strike by UK logistics firm staff

Around 50 workers employed by the DHL logistics supply chain held a one-day strike Monday. They are employed at Spectrum for Arcadia, a division of DHL, at a warehouse in Shirley, near Solihull in the English Midlands.

The division delivers items ordered online from Arcadia brands, including Topshop, Topman, Miss Selfridge and Burton. Arcadia is owned by former BHS boss, Sir Philip Green. The strike impacted on the distribution of Internet-originated sales on one of the busiest days for online orders in the lead-up to Christmas.

The GMB union members are currently paid the national minimum

wage and are seeking to be paid the Real Living Wage, currently set at £8.45 by the Living Wage Foundation.

## Strike by UK post office managers

Staff who manage the 300 Crown Post Offices—the main dedicated offices in towns and cities—are to strike on Saturday. This follows strikes held on September 15 and October 31.

The managers are opposing plans to sell off the state-owned post offices, cut staff and end the current defined pension scheme in March next year. They are members of the Unite union and the Communications Workers Union.

## UK atomic weapons staff to hold further strike

Staff working for the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) are to hold a further 24-hour strike on December 5. The members of the Unite union, who voted by a more than 90 percent majority for action, are based at Aldermaston and Burghfield, Berkshire.

The strike is in opposition to AWE's plans to phase out the defined benefit pension scheme and replace it with an inferior one.

AWE, employing around 4,000 staff, was formally a UK government Ministry of Defence establishment, but is now jointly owned by American companies Lockheed Martin and Jacobs Engineering and the UK-based Serco.

## Strike of Greek bus drivers over non-payment of wages

Bus drivers in the Greek city of Thessaloniki struck last Saturday, in an ongoing dispute over unpaid wages. The Thessaloniki Urban Transport Organisation went to court Monday in an attempt to halt the stoppage. In September, the drivers walked off the job for 12 days, demanding three months in unpaid wages. At the time, the head of the union involved said drivers had not been paid since July.

## Strike by Mercedes employees in Hungary

On November 24, around 80 workers at the Mercedes plant in the Hungarian city of Kecskemet held a two-hour strike to push for a 15 percent wage increase in 2017. They threatened to take further action if their demands were not met. They are members of the Vasas trade union.

### **Irish TV staff oppose outsourcing threat**

Staff working for the Irish television broadcaster RTE are threatening to boycott an upcoming popular children's TV programme, "The Late Late Toy Show." The threat is in response to RTE's plans to outsource young people's television programming. In response, RTE has extended the contracts of the staff under threat until January 31. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union is in talks with management over the issue.

### **Icelandic teachers to vote on new contract**

Icelandic teachers are to vote on a new contract offer on December 12, following a dispute over low pay. The Union of Icelandic Grade School Teachers has negotiated a contract that, if accepted, will be backdated to December 1 and run for a year. They have twice rejected offers from the employer.

More than 100 teachers have resigned in the course of the dispute. Last month teachers walked out of school on two occasions before the end of the school day. They have also protested outside Reykjavik City Hall.

### **Work to rule by Israeli airline pilots**

Talks to resolve the work to rule by El Al airline pilots have broken down. The pilots are seeking a pay rise, an improvement in working conditions and for the company to stop rescheduling flights to other companies to avoid paying overtime.

Pilots walked out of the talks Monday morning, saying that an agreement made the previous day had not been included in the draft agreement presented to them.

### **Kenyan flower farm workers face onslaught on jobs, pay and conditions**

Flower farm workers in Kenya are on strike to demand a pay increase and improved working conditions. Workers on the farms were awarded a 25 percent pay increase under a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) earlier this year.

Four hundred workers at the Creative Rose farm walked out this week, demanding the repayment of wage deductions and the introduction of the CBA. For the last two years, the company has been taking subscriptions to the National Insurance Hospital Fund and pension contributions, deducted from wages, and not forwarding them to appropriate bodies.

Striking workers at Creative Rose were driven off the farm by armed riot police. Several thousand workers at Kenya's flower farms have lost

their jobs over the last few months, with employers blaming the reduction in the European market and the high cost of labour.

### **Swaziland brick workers in standoff over wages**

Workers employed by Langa Bricks in Swaziland are continuing their strike into a third week to demand a pay increase. The workers are demanding a rise of 3 Swazi emalangeni (\$0.21) an hour. The company initially offered 0.5 Swazi emalangeni an hour (\$0.04), but then withdrew it.

Langa accuse workers of sabotaging a scabbing operation by cutting the electricity supply to the company, saying this is why they have withdrawn their pay offer. The strikers said they would not return to work until an offer is made.

### **Kenyan health workers prepare strike**

Health service providers in Isiolo County, Kenya have threatened to strike. The Kenyan National Union of Nurses says its 450 members will strike December 5 if previous promises are not met.

The union demands the employment of more nurses, promotion of qualified nurses and payment of referral and health risk allowances. The union claims that pledges by management to implement these demands have been consistently broken.

### **Kenyan water workers end strike**

Kenyan water workers at Siaya-Bondo Water and Sanitation Company returned to work after management promised to pay outstanding wages and deduction arrears after a two-week strike.

The workers are demanding three months owed wages are paid and that all deductions be paid to appropriate bodies. Funding, from wages, of health care coverage, pension funds and other such deductions had not been passed on. The state government has blamed the Water Board management for incompetence and has demanded its resignation within two weeks.

The governor promised the state would repay wages and contributions to workers within 10 days. The practice of unpaid wages and misappropriated deductions has become widespread, particularly across the public sector.

### **South African Municipal workers sacked for striking**

Two hundred public sector workers employed in Msukaligwa municipality in Mpumalanga, South African have been sacked. The employees, responsible for providing water and electricity to the area, were given notice of dismissal on Monday.

They were sacked in response to what was designated as an illegal strike, embarked on in October. Workers walked out in an attempt to bring a drawn-out legal dispute over grading to a conclusion. They took action

demanding to be placed in grade four of the salary structure, which would have improved their earnings. The strike severely affected the provision of services to the community. The employers responded by bringing in a scab workforce.

The South African Municipal Workers Union says the employers did not provide, as they had done previously, an opportunity for workers to discuss re-grading. Workers walked out because the new structure was not being implemented.



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